



## Young Reporters Scotland 2015-2016

### The Ostrich Generation

By Ruaridh Thin-Smith

There's something more than a little cringe about when organizations try to communicate with young people, generally speaking. They always seem to try and get 'down with the kids', but in actual fact they succeed only in producing material which is down on the floor, going nowhere and gathering dust.

Being offered the role of PR and Marketing Intern at Environmental Art Festival Scotland came with a challenge right from the start- behind the dizzying excitement of being involved with such a forward thinking and fresh project lay the task at hand: re-engage young people with the vastly uninteresting and corporate climate change and sustainability debate.

Environmental Art Festival Scotland (EAFS) is one such event which needed to meet this challenge head on in the last few months, particularly with respect to re-establishing lost links between youngsters in Dumfries and Galloway and the rural surroundings they live in.

This year saw the development of 'EAFS Recharge', which was a particular youth project developed to encourage and draw younger people into engaging with the main festival. The youth project was initially intended to run adjacent to the main festival as a separate social media campaign, but instead became more like a call to action to entice people to engage with the main festival.

It's no secret that issues of landscape and environment have always been used and talked about in such a way that they become jaded and tarnished with very uninspiring and unimaginative language and imagery- how to refresh this whole aesthetic and make people fully understand the effects that their actions have on the planet?

Out of a lot of coffee and brainstorming came the understanding that getting young people to engage with the landscape requires finding the right balance between technology and outdoor life- so we meditated on the benefits of Instagram as a network for engaging younger people. Pretty pictures of nature tend to be the vice of young 'scene' kids with a Starbucks addiction and extended regrowth, but what happens when you introduce the same imagery with a targeted environmental message behind it? The answer is simple: interest and curiosity.

Using a visually led campaign which focused on enticing young people with striking images, we sought the assistance of Alison Boyes, a very talented local photographer who agreed to take pictures of different stunts that we organized. The first, and most successful of these, was the EAFS Unicorn. Taking a sweet tempered pony, the EAFS team had a special Unicorn's horn crafted and carefully woven into the pony's forelock- the resulting pictures of the 'Unicorn'

appearing at public events were an immediate success, and inspired interest and attention from young people (and older people alike) all over the country, and indeed the world!

In the wake of this, we tried and tested a whole range of experimental social media tricks to encourage youth into the festival, and we managed to set up a cushy base from which to build our strategy in future years. But fast-forward to the festival weekend, and the results that we saw in a minimal amount of time were great! As it happens, there are plenty of young cool kids out in the world who are very much interested in helping the planet to heal and become a better place for everyone- they just need a little shake from a crack force of social media pirates such as the likes of we!

It takes a lot of time and effort to encourage youngsters to remember their importance and to realize that they own the world as much as their grandparents do. Keep up to date with the things EAFS will be getting up to in the future if you are interested in learning more about how you can recharge your own relationship with the earth!

